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AUTHOR Nickel, Jean Krahn
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ABSTRACT

This article offers suggestions for and examples of fundraising activities for community-based education programs. Topics addressed include: (1) the importance of fundraising and the advantages of being self-sufficient; (2) recommendations on planning fundraising activities and on planning campaigns to publicize the activities; and (3) approaches to grass roots fundraising. Examples of the following types of fundraising activities are given along with guidelines for conducting them: dinner theaters, tours of unique or interesting homes, and bake sales. (DC)

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"Grasping The Fund Raising Straws"

By Jean Krahn Nickel

Dinner theatre proceeds from the western musical "Hickok" go to support the Courtland Community Education Program. *(Photo by Carol Sanderson, The Courtland Journal).*

"Self-supporting" is fast becoming the cliche of the 1980's. The '80's are rapidly proving to be a decade characterized by economic inflation, repression and even depression. Community funded organizations across the nation are grasping for financial straws simply to survive — much less grow and be creative in meeting increasing community needs.

Even though grassroots organizations, including free university, community-based education programs are facing rather bleak times, some bright spots exemplified through the Kansas programs can be identified. By sharing some fund raising information and three successful events, we hope to encourage various groups and organizations to test their wings and explore fund raising activities of their own.

Two major reasons fund raisers are important to your program or project are (1) they can produce a sizeable portion of a program budget, and (2) they allow the organization to be independent. Fund raisers not only generate money for the organization, but heighten the visibility of the group and make for good publicity and public relations, thereby building support for the project in the community.

Who is responsible for fund raising? It should not be a foregone conclusion that any one person or committee should automatically assume fund raising responsibilities. Careful consideration should be given to organizing a special "fund raising" committee. Some organizations select one person to serve as a fund raiser. This person could be the program coordinator, a board representative or someone from the community. In some situations the entire Advisory Board becomes involved in the campaign, while in other communities a separate ad hoc committee is selected to coordinate the fund raising activities. The pros and cons should be carefully weighed for whichever model is selected. Remember that a sense of ownership in the venture is mandatory to make the campaign a success in the community.

Good planning is essential to successful fund raising. Begin by analyzing your local community. Identify other fund raising activities and determine if they were successful and why. Avoid overlapping your campaign with other local fund raising activities. Develop a long range plan for fund raising. Plan not only for the present year, but look ahead to the next 2-3 years or more. Determine short and long term goals and objectives. How much money is needed? How will the funds be expended? What kinds of fund raising events should be planned?

Publicity is one key to successful fund raising. Plan for an effective publicity campaign to publicize the fund raising event. Take advantage of the event to capitalize on other activities going on within your program. Use all forms of media from newspapers, radio, television to word-of-mouth. Throughout the campaign, be sure that you make clear what the money raised will be used for. When potential donors know how their monies will be spent, they are more inclined to make a contribution.

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Approaches. There are two general approaches to grassroots fund raising. One is to take a small event with little or no capital investment and make it a success. As your organization becomes more adept at raising money, the event can be adapted and expanded. The second approach is to pick an event that will be popular, give the organization publicity, raise a lot of money, and then stay with it from year to year. Over a period of time, the event will become synonomous with the organization. Preparation and publicity will become easier while the event becomes larger and raises more money.

Successful Fund Raising Events

Imagination is the only limitation for developing ideas for successful fund raising events. Some popular events include arts and crafts fairs, benefit concerts, bake sales, dinner theatres, home tours and something-a-thons. Work at capturing the imagination of your supporters. Local fund raisers often turn out to be ingenious special events involving most of the community. Kansas community-based education programs are proving to be innovative and growing organizations through the efforts of effective fund raising programs.

1. **Dinner Theatres.** Several communities have ignited serious interest in community theatre by producing successful annual dinner theatres as fund raisers. Courtland, Kansas is one such community. Why have they been so successful? They have an ex-theatre major who loves the work and enjoys being involved in community theatre. The Courtland folks recommend the following if you are considering a dinner theatre as a fund raiser (1) choose a melodrama or western comedy which has low royalties; (2) rent the costumes from an area school or college, sewing is too time-consuming; (3) have the Advisory Board take responsibility for ticket sales, ushering and food; (4) keep a tight eye on the budget, costumes and props can well exceed the profit budget even with sell-out crowds.

Serving full course dinners may not be as profitable as you would like. You may want to adjust the "dinner" aspect of the theatre to something simpler, yet elegant. A community theatre is a lot of work, but is a good way to raise money and it gives great visibility for the program. Courtland theatre productions have included "Plaza Suite" and a musical "Hickok."

Bake sale fund raiser sponsored by Marais des Cygene Community Education Program. Clara Louderback (right), program coordinator, and Linda Robbins (left), advisory board member, encourage a sale.

2. **Home Tours.** Home tours with specific emphasis on history, architecture, energy-efficiency and holiday decorations have all proven to be successful events with little or no upfront costs. The financial angle of tours is paid admissions. Belleville Area Free University hosts a Christmas tour every other year. Some of their comments include the following: (1) Select a person who will coordinate the planning and home tour confirmations. The tour coordinator must allow enough lead time to make homeowners aware of the tour and to gain commitments from tour participants. Timing is crucial in planning seasonal home tours. (2) Board members assist with ticket sales and donate refreshments for a social hour following the tour. (3) Ticket prices are $3.00 for non-members and $2.00 for Donor Club members. Color coding the tickets helps. Red tickets begin at House A while blue tickets start at House B. Five colors are sold. This allows grouping with friends prior to the tour and prevents group divisions and mass confusion the day of the event. (4) Participants meet at a prearranged meeting place at the start of the tour and proceed in their block of people to House A. (5) Each tour is 20 minutes in length, with 10 minutes driving time allowed between tour homes. (6) Board members serve as tour guides. (7) Following the tour all participants returned to a central location for refreshments.

3. **Bake Sales.** Pomona's Marais des Cygne Community Education Program recently sponsored a bake sale as a fund raiser. Sale items were donated by advisory board members and interested community people. The sale was well publicized with posters displayed in local shops and through public service radio spots. The local bank, a central location, served as the sale site. Pomona folks suggest reminder phone calls to persons asked to bring sale goods. Bake sales require no initial capital investment and are easily adapted and expanded.

Fund raising is not limited to theatres, tours or bake sales. Organizations and groups can apply to foundations and corporations, develop an Annual Fund Drive and Donors Clubs. These and other areas of fund raising will be explored in future issues of the *Rural Community Education Report.*